

SC 093 Comparative Social Change
Prof. Paul S. Gray

Spring 2009
Tue/Th 3-4:15 p.m.
Cushing 209

My office is 507 McGuinn. Office Hours, Tue/Th 1:30-2:30 p.m., or by appointment. Phone ext. 24140. E-Mail: < gray@bc.edu >

T.A.: Amanda Freeman. Office Hours, Wed 11-12, or by appointment. <freemaad@bc.edu>

Books:

EXPLORING SOCIAL CHANGE, 5th ed., by Charles Harper & Kevin Leight

FALLING BEHIND, by Robert Frank

GLOBAL PROBLEMS & THE CULTURE OF CAPITALISM, 4th ed., by Richard Robbins

FIRST ALONG THE RIVER, 3rd ed. , by Benjamin Kline

THE LIMITS OF POWER, by Andrew Bacevich

Grades: There will be a term paper (approx.15 pp.) in addition to take home mid term and final examinations. Each counts 1/3 of your grade. Please consult the College Bulletin for general grading standards. Have each reading completed by the dates shown below. I reserve the right to make changes in assignments, with due notice.

ABOUT THIS COURSE

This is an introductory level course in social change. You will be learning some basic sociological concepts that help us to understand the nature of change - its magnitude, force, and direction. By the end of the course you will be able to think in an analytic fashion concerning some of the most important trends of the present-day, including: the decline of community, the globalization of the economy, the aftermath of the cold war, and the transformation from modern to post industrial society.

In this course you will learn something about the history and origins of these and other significant social changes, and the projected future trends that will influence you in your roles as a family member, a student, a worker, and as a citizen.

Change occurs at a variety of levels. Three such levels are the individual, organizational, and global domains of social life. The **individual** level is the study of our consciousness, awareness and motivation as human actors. It is the portion of social change covered by the field of social psychology. The **organizational** level examines modifications to social structure (e.g., in families, schools, businesses, and nations). It is the portion of social change covered by the fields of political sociology and complex organizations. Finally, the **global** dimension explores universal changes which affect the entire planet. This portion of social change is covered by the fields of development studies, population, ecology, and war and peace studies. As you can see, this course presents a good, general introduction to the subject of Sociology as a whole, because in taking social change as its theme it touches on so many different special areas of knowledge.

A CORE COURSE

As a Core course in Sociology, Comparative Social Change has the features characteristic of all core courses. It is designed to:

- a) help students to ask, and answer, the "perennial questions"
- b) present culturally diverse material
- c) present an historical view of the subject
- d) demonstrate the methodology of the discipline
- e) include a significant writing component

f) challenge students to create a personal philosophy of life.

a. the perennial questions

Many of the "essentially contested concepts" of western thought appear as a natural part of sociological inquiry in this course. You will be learning some major social theories, or general systems of ideas, which attempt to explain social change by examining how society is possible at all, and how much social conformity is necessary for it to survive. We shall begin our analysis with a study of cultures, American and foreign, in order to show the impact of culture on social behavior and on the differing ability of peoples to adapt to conditions of tyranny and democracy.

The varieties of political, economic and social arrangements which characterize different societies, at important benchmark stages of history as well as in the contemporary world, are systematically described and debated as we trace the evolution of culture and society. Understanding this variety, and the passions and prejudices which often justify and sustain it, leads us to question the nature of human freedom, and to wonder about the limits of our ability to withstand oppression. In what sense is the world better off today than it was in our ancestors' day? Is the contemporary quality of life in America clearly better than it was for our grandparents? The persistence, and worsening, of such social problems as crime, pollution of the environment, the threat of war, disease and famine, poverty and social inequality all cause us to ask: What is the meaning of progress? In a materialistic and individualistic era how can we measure "success" in life in a way that makes sense for ourselves and our families?

Finally, in this course we examine the components of a meaningful life, as family member, worker and citizen. Two key thinkers whose works are presented are the sociologists Max Weber and Robert Putnam. Weber asked: what is the relationship between religious faith and social structure? He demonstrated the power of religious ideas to create entire economic and political systems. Putnam's present-day research explores the intricate connection between the individual and the community. In our pursuit of material gain, status, and economic security, we have undoubtedly increased our own alienation and have ignored the essential, community-centered side of life. We shall be looking at various social action strategies that attempt to combine the solution of social problems with the restoration of a sense of purpose beyond the "bottom line."

b. cultural diversity

This course is, in essence, comparative. This means that social changes and historical events in the United States are viewed within a global context. We can learn to see ourselves, in part, as others see us. In addition, systematic comparison of our society with others enables constructive criticism and exposure to the logic of other ways of life. Because there are marked similarities in patterns of social inequality both within the United States and between the United States and other countries, the voices of the disadvantaged in both contexts are surfaced in a way that maximizes their import. The viewpoints of women, peoples of color, and the poor are highlighted.

c. historical perspective

Historical data are an essential ingredient in explaining social change. In this course, no social phenomena appear in isolation, and the significance of present-day events is bound up with an appreciation of history. You will learn how to use such data in creating a convincing sociological argument.

d. methodology

Sociology is a social science. It has a strong tradition of striving for a naturalistic explanation of social behavior. Therefore, in analyzing social change we emphasize cause and effect relationships and the search for discrete explanatory variables, as well as the establishment of rules of inquiry and presentation of evidence in formulating an analysis.

e. writing component

You are expected to produce two essay examinations (take home mid-term and final) as well as a term paper of about 15 pp. Expectations for term papers will be described in detail on **Thursday, February 26th**. The specific topic is open to each student's interest, but it should focus on a significant social change that is occurring now. Topics need to be approved before research begins, so that we may assist you with planning the paper. Please bring a one page outline of the paper to class on **Thursday, March 12th**. **Papers are due on the last class day - Thursday April 30th, 2009.**

f. creating a personal philosophy

A central theme for this course is the idea of human dignity. In spite of all the structural constraints which we may demonstrate are acting upon men and women in society, human beings nonetheless thirst for freedom. By the end of the course you will have examined all sorts of people who are operating within their "assigned coordinates" in society: minorities, women, youth, the aged, workers, politicians, entrepreneurs, etc. I hope you will appreciate that these individuals are doing more than merely conforming to social norms with robot-like precision; they also attempt to maximize their potential. Our perspective on the issue of "free will" is: "People are "free," but rarely just as free as they believe they are." We encourage you effectively to act for the betterment of society and for yourself, just as many of the individuals and groups you will read about have done. To accomplish this goal, you must have a realistic view of the barriers, as well as the opportunities that you face.

The theme of social amelioration, solving social problems, has a major place in the development of American sociology. This course should challenge you to become part of this tradition by informing yourself about the severity of problems and your own potential for meaningful social action.

Calendar

Please have all readings and assignments completed by dates shown. I reserve the right to make changes, with due notice.

day	date	topic / activity	assignment
INTRODUCTION			
Thu	1/15	Thinking About Change	Harper, ch. 1
Tue	1/20	Levels of Change I	Harper, ch. 2
Thu	1/22	Levels of Change II	Robbins, pp. 1-11
Tue	1/27	Culture and Change	Robbins, ch. 1
CULTURAL CHANGE IN AMERICA			
Thu	1/29	"The Good Life", 1946-2008	Harper, ch. 4
Tue	2/3	Seeds of the '60's	
Thu	2/5	Counterculture	
Tue	2/10	The Millennial Generation	

THEORIES OF CHANGE

Thu 2/12 Functionalist I
Tue 2/17 Functionalist II

Harper, chs. 3, 5
Harper, ch. 6; Robbins, ch. 2

day	date	topic / activity	assignment
Thu	2/19	Conflict	Robbins, chs. 10, 11
Tue	2/24	Weberian, Rise & Fall and Micro-Level	Robbins, ch. 12
PERSISTENCE OF INEQUALITY			
Thu	2/26	Social Class I	HAND OUT PAPER ASSIGNMENT
VACATION			
Tue	3/10	Social Class II	Frank, <u>all</u>
Thu	3/12	Gender and Race	PAPER OUTLINES DUE
COMMUNITY			
Tue	3/17	Decline of Community I	Robbins, pp. 373-379
Thu	3/19	Decline of Community II	HAND OUT MIDTERM
Tue	3/24	Psychology and Religion	MID-TERM IS DUE
CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS			
Thu	3/26	The Future of Work	Harper, ch. 10
Tue	3/31	The Rise of Terrorism	Robbins, pp. 299-305; 370-373; 381-386
Thu	4/2	America and the World	Bacevich, pp. 1-84; 118-140; 170-182
COMPARATIVE CHANGE			
Tue	4/7	International Stratification	Robbins, chs. 4 , 5, 6
VACATION			
Tue	4/14	Modernization	Robbins, ch. 3 and pp. 141-14
Thu	4/16	Development & Globalization	Robbins ch. 9; Harper chs. 9 & 12
MAKING CHANGES			
Tue	4/21	Social Movements	Harper, chs. 7, 8, 11
Thu	4/23	The Ecology Movement I	Kline, chs. 1-5
Tue	4/28	The Ecology Movement II	Kline, chs. 6-11; Harper, ch. 13
CONCLUSIONS			
Thu	4/30	Personal Change-Making Experiences	Robbins, ch. 13
		Beyond Capitalism and Socialism	Harper, ch. 14
			TERM PAPERS ARE DUE
			HAND OUT FINAL EXAM
FINAL EXAMINATION due in my mailbox, 426 McGuinn, by 12:00 p.m., Thursday, May 7, 2009.			